

The Plan for the Rewording of RDA and the Role of the Copy Editor

The U.S. RDA Test Coordinating Committee called for a rewording of RDA instructions in “clear, unambiguous, plain English.” The committee identified the following steps to meet this objective within 18 months (beginning in July 2011):

- Prioritize chapters in accordance with comments submitted by the U.S. RDA Test Coordinating Committee.
- Identify and engage a copy editor to copyedit the content.
- Confirm readability of initial chapter rewrites.
- Submit at least 5 chapters to the Test Committee by June 2012.

The CoP has authorized ALA Publishing, on behalf of the Co-Publishers of RDA, to engage a copy editor. The copy editor will improve the readability and comprehensibility of the RDA instructions without altering the meaning or intent of the instructions.

Improving the Readability of RDA

In their report the committee cites the Plain Writing Act of 2010 as a standard for the stylistic goals of the RDA content. The Plain Writing Act defines plain writing as “writing that is clear, concise, well-organized, and follows other best practices appropriate to the subject or field and intended audience.”

The copy editor will follow this standard in addressing the following aspects the testers noted:

- Wordiness
- An unnecessarily complicated style and language that is an obstacle to understanding
- Redundancy
- Sentence structures that lead to the possibility of multiple interpretations

To accomplish the goals of addressing tester concerns and meeting the above definition of “plain writing”, the copy editor will give special attention to the following:

1. Audience – the audience for RDA is the cataloging staff for libraries and similar institutions, both professionals and paraprofessionals.
2. Voice—wherever possible convert passive to active constructions.
3. Sentence Length—RDA testers commented that the sentence structure of the instructions often made it difficult to understand the meaning. The copy editor should look for opportunities to shorten and reconstruct at both the sentence and paragraph level to improve clarity and concision.
4. Language—testers also found that much of the language was too abstract and specialized. The copy editor should introduce a level of diction that is accessible to all members of a cataloging

staff. An inline definition or gloss should be considered when a specialized term is used in the running text of an instruction.

The Test Committee assessed the readability of RDA as compared to AACR2, CCO, and ISBD and recommended that RDA be reworded to a similar reading level. We are targeting a score 12.X on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level readability scale for all revised chapters. The Flesch-Kincaid test is included in MS Word.

The copy editor will work only on the text of the RDA instructions and other assigned content. Examples and tables are not included in the scope of this project.

For matters of style, the copy editor will follow and revise (as needed) the RDA Editor's Guide, which is available at <http://www.rda-jsc.org/working2.html#rda-edguide>.

The Copyediting Process and Schedule

The project manager and primary point of contact for the copy editor is James Hennelly at ALA Publishing. He is responsible for maintaining the work schedule and deadlines, providing manuscript to the copy editor, and shepherding completed work through the review process. He is the copy editor's contact for all questions regarding editorial process and practice, scheduling, compensation, and other such issues. The copy editor will also have a JSC contact for queries regarding RDA content and intended meaning.

The review process will begin once a full chapter is complete. The JSC will review each edited chapter and then submit it to the test committee for evaluation. If revisions are needed, the chapter will be returned to the copy editor.

Our goal is to have submitted Chapters 6, 9, 10, 11, and 17 to the U.S. Test Committee by the beginning of June 2012. The copy editor will begin with Chapter 9 and address it as a test case for honing the workflow. Once work has begun, we will set the schedule for all remaining chapters not listed above, with a goal of completing all the rewording as quickly as is practical and possible.